

1312 Elon Rd.
Henrico, Virginia 23229

July 7, 2019

Mr. Damon Duncan
President and Chief Executive Officer
RRHA
901 Chamberlayne Parkway,
Richmond, Virginia 23220

Mr. Duncan:

I am writing to express concern with RRHA's approach to moving from its current model to the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program.

While RAD programs continue to use taxpayer funds to provide housing opportunities to low-income citizens, they often do so at the expense of transparency, accountability, and community input, while also creating hurdles for those most in need of housing. We can look to 2017 media coverage of Hopewell, Virginia's transition to RAD for examples of house residents were mistreated and how it played out in the legal system and in the public eye.

It's my opinion that converting to a public-private model is not ideal. However, should RRHA move forward with conversion to this approach, it's also my opinion that it 1:1 replacement of units should be developed and that all current residents should be provided with transition services and an opportunity to occupy one of the new units. I also request that the suggested 2020 Annual Plan revert to prior language that requires decisions regarding these properties to be evaluated by HUD, RRHA tenants, the Richmond Tenants' Organization, and the Board of Commissioners.

Approximately 5% of Richmond City's most in-need citizens count on these homes for their shelter. It is my hope that as you continue to transition into this role that you serve and listen to our most vulnerable neighbors before serving seeking to serve the interests of developers and powerful decision makers.

Kind regards,

Melissa McKenney



**NICHOLAS
DA SILVA**
Our voice for Richmond 5th

July 8th, 2019

To the Board of RRHA,

I am writing to you to strongly urge against the adoption of the proposed demolition and conversion of public housing outlined in the "Five Year Agency Plan for Fiscal Years 2019-2024." The proposed solutions to meet housing needs pose a significant risk to the wellbeing of the working class and Richmond's most at-risk families. If the proposed changes to public housing were approved our city would suffer from the same failures of other mixed-finance redevelopment projects. The proposed plan displaces current occupants and presents them two options, either wait for the privatized housing "*replacements*" to their former public housing or attempt to find housing in the private market. Both options hurt occupants, yet, both options benefit developers.

Demolishing public housing and converting public housing to an assistance-based system will displace thousands of residents living in poverty, uncap rent rates across the Greater Richmond Region, and line the pockets of private developers who aspire to segregate our city through gentrification. Moreover, every problem caused by the conversion of public housing to mixed-finance housing will disproportionately affect Black residents, as Black residents constitute 61.2 percent of Richmonders of those living at or below the federal poverty rate.

The destruction of public housing courts throughout the city will naturally lead to a massive displacement of families and single people. This displacement will exacerbate Richmond's already disastrous eviction crisis. Richmond suffers from one of the highest eviction rates amongst large U.S. cities. One in nine people were evicted in the city in 2016. Occupants of the demolished public housing suddenly forced to take on additional living expenses will then enter an unequal private housing market. Government assistance from HUD or RRHA will not protect former public housing occupants from the hostile landlords or predatory lenders. Finding new housing is also not a guarantee. Although illegal, former occupants can be discriminated against and denied housing based on their Section 8 status. The most likely scenario for former occupants is to fall further into poverty.

The addition of thousands of new renters into the private market will additionally reduce competition in the housing market and free landlords from a prohibiting factor to the rate of rent. With public housing no longer creating a bottom for the accepted market standard of rent, the rate of rent will increase significantly. New competition amongst tenants to secure the limit amount of housing made available by landlords will price out renters in the private market who struggled to find affordable housing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 25.2 percent of Richmonders live at or below the poverty line. An increase in rent prices spurred



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by landlords capitalizing on the influx of individuals seeking housing will force many into homelessness.

The contracts RRHA is soliciting private investments to fund new projects will not serve to make low-income housing more readily available. However, rewarding private developers with building projects will increase the profits for the private developers.

New developments undertaken by private enterprises will also bring additional efforts to gentrify Richmond. Increasing rents, evictions, and cultural eradication will tear apart working-class neighborhoods, bulldozing the wealth of families and individuals, all while bringing public and private dollars alike into the pockets of for-profit companies. Gentrification will inevitably be a result of the privatization of public housing.

Furthermore, the act of removing public housing overwhelmingly affects African-Americans, a trend which tracks with our city's past. To cite Richmonder, Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom, from an interview with Richmond Magazine, "Richmond is fortuitous because it has benefited from black labor and never really had to give black people credit for it." Enslavement, Black Codes, redlining, and gentrification are simply some of the tactics employed in a long history of exploitation. We cannot be complicit in removing wealth from more Black communities.

The engagement of affected families and individuals has been minimal. Few tenants were present at the public feedback meeting and the subsequent mail-in or physical-feedback public comment process has proven burdensome, creating additional layers of complexity, further negating the voices of occupants and applicants. In totality, the comment and petition process is fundamentally undemocratic. Those who struggle to find housing security will be made homeless for the benefit of private interests, all without the consent of the majority.

Please consider the ramifications of this plan for the working class of Richmond. Privatization is not the solution to the housing crisis; keep our public housing public.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Da Silva
Candidate for Richmond's 5th City Council District

Eric Sundberg
Campaign Manager

(RRHA Commissioners)

July 8, 2019

To Whom it may concern

I am not a public housing resident, but live near Gilpin Court complex.

I understand that residents are to receive vouchers in this transition from public housing. In theory, this is great, but my concern is the misunderstandings of their next steps.

Are vouchers immediately received or is there a waiting list? I have heard several versions of how persons will be transitioned to other properties.

One of the greatest injustices humans face is the dignity or lack of dignity shown public housing residents.

Many issues have surfaced during the course of their residency, pertaining to property management, but you received their funds anyway... which provided income on bonds. I truly would like to see Richmond City lead the way in transitioning with dignity residents to better housing immediately without media highlighting the ills of the transition.

Another point of concern is whether you are forcing this population into the counties or

outside of the state and create a lowered
populus for the city and an auto price tax
hike on amenities of the remaining residents.

Please make your priority

- transitioning persons with dignity
by immediate vouchers - no long
waiting lists.
- provide assistance in property location
for those that would need assistance
- help Dickinson stand for something
positive out of it all.
- If 1 for 1 replacement is not offered
then find agencies to contract to
help find relocation in the city
Keep our numbers up! If we are
not careful, Mexico may become
the new capital city - with all the
federal funds to support them.

Marlyn Campbell
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Who benefits? Who decides?

RRHA silences residents, voting for massive displacement

RRHA has released a proposal—outlined in pages 28-34 of RRHA's 2019-2020 Annual Agency Plan—to demolish Richmond's public housing courts without good-faith engagement or brick-and-mortar replacement for current tenants. The public can comment on the proposal this week. Despite the high stakes of these actions, RRHA has made little effort to engage tenants or the broader public in evaluating these proposals:

- While RRHA held a public meeting, it made no substantive effort to engage residents.
- Due to minimal resident engagement by RRHA, only a few tenants were in attendance—those residents were informed through grassroots tenant organizing, not the Authority or its staff.
- Following its poorly publicized meetings, the Authority has limited feedback on its proposals to a paper mail-in process, creating an unnecessary burden for stakeholders and a delay in submission.

Without publicized robust community engagement, this proposal is both undemocratic and a violation of the rights of public housing tenants to “be involved and participate in the overall policy development and direction of public housing operations” (title 24; section 964, *Code of Federal Regulations*).

The lack of resident input in public housing governance is widely recognized by advocacy organizations like the Right to the City Alliance as a private-sector mechanism for eliminating secure housing for low-income residents in favor of unaffordable rental units with high eviction rates. These policies fuel displacement and disproportionately target African-American, working-class, and working-poor residents.

This rapid-fire elimination of Richmond's most affordable housing will destroy communities and create a crisis. Our waitlist for public housing access is already overburdened. Our city lacks sufficient housing and we have one of the highest private-housing eviction rates in the country.

Public housing elimination and replacement with privately subsidized housing, will have a devastating effect on our public school system, where some of our least-resourced schools serve children and families who currently reside in our public housing neighborhoods. A sudden spike in housing insecurity will leave families who are scrambling to locate housing unsure of their enrollment status in a school district with limited resources to support parents in navigating our open enrollment process.

In our neighborhoods and in our schools, the actions proposed by our housing authority will increase housing insecurity and compound our city's history of institutional racism. The disproportionate African-American residents of Richmond's public housing have a right to the city their ancestors built.

RRHA must honor public process and public feedback in its 2019-2020 plan.

Kristin Reed
Richmond, 7th District

Lafonda Page
Richmond, 7th District

Gary Broderick
Richmond, 7th District

Jasmine Leeward
Richmond, 7th District

Nicolas DaSilva
Richmond
5th District City Council
Candidate

Thomas Burkett
Virginia River Healers
Richmond, 3rd District

Qiana Richards
Richmond, 6th District

Alexander Sparrow
DSA Richmond
Richmond, 2nd District

Nathan Arries
Richmond, VA

Laura Goren
Richmond, 6th District

Donna Joyce
Parent & Advocate
Richmond, 3rd District

Amy Wentz
Richmond, 8th District

Jesse Goldstein
Richmond, 3rd District
Christopher Romero
Richmond, 7th District

Alex Wagaman
Richmond, 1st District

Marty Jewell
Former Richmond City
Councilman
Richmond, 7th District

Wendy Boyton
Richmond, 7th District

Laura McCann
Richmond, 3rd District

Kate Baltes
Richmond, 5th District

James Randall
Richmond, 5th District

Kristen Tate
Richmond, VA

Charles Peters
Richmond, 1st District

Haya Hamid
Richmond, 7th District

Elsa Rios
Richmond, 1st District

Maya Walters
Richmond, 2nd District

Martha Roberts
Richmond, 3rd District

Brian Knox
Richmond, 3rd District

Ashley Smith
Richmond, 2nd District

Ben Himmelfarb
Richmond 1st District

Debbie Rowe
Richmond, 3rd District

Eric Sundberg
Richmond, 5th District

Erek Jones
Richmond, 1st District

Anneliese Grant
Richmond, 5th District

Paige Bailey
Richmond, 7th District

Seth Hatmaker
Richmond, Va

Suzanne Keller
Richmond, 4th District

Andrea Bryant
Richmond, 6th District

Will Kerner
Richmond, 2nd District

Nathan Jamerson
Richmond, 1st District

DarShee Clark
Richmond, 7th District

Sarah Pedersen
Richmond, 7th District

Jessica Shim
Richmond, 4th District

Isabel Eljaiek
Richmond, 7th District

Nicholas Buffin
Richmond, 5th District

Brett Sprouse
Richmond, 2nd District

Jaylynne West,
Richmond, Va

Jeremy Hoffman
Richmond, 2nd District

Whitney Whiting
Richmond, 4th District

Samuel West
Richmond, 8th District

Dolores Fitzgerald
Richmond, 5th District

Amanda Long
Richmond, 5th District

Kaitlin Eastman
Richmond, 3rd District

Bradley Armstrong
Richmond, 2nd District

Elizabeth Johnson
Richmond, 2nd District

Jeanna Chapman
Richmond, 4th District

Paul Granger
Richmond, 7th District

Jacob Schroeder
Henrico, Va

Jay Tubb
Henrico, Va

Dean Sayers
Mechanicsville, Va

Sharon Murphy
Chesterfield, Va

Daniel Moss
Midlothian, Va

Brandon Collins
Charlottesville, Va

William Magnant
Doswell, Va

Tyshawn Smithers
Fredericksburg, Va

Lauren Garcia
Laurel, Va

Anthony Casamassima
Henrico, Va

Matthew Conover
Farmville, Va

David Foley
Huntersville, NC

Mei Yang

Yohance Whitaker

Sheila Wier

Community Comments:

"Where would this plan leave me and my five kids to live. How are you all (RRHA) planning on helping us if we do not have the option to move back in. What is the plan I need want and deserve some answers." – Lafonda Page

"The RRHA absolutely should be engaging the community regarding this plan. The city cannot continue to ignore the needs of its most vulnerable populations." – Christopher Romero

"As a former 5th District Councilman and 15 yr., At-Large member of city-wide Tenant Org., this is a massive violation of HUD law. City Council has the authority to correct this and must do so. This is a continuation of Corporates plan to eliminate the City's poor in pursuit of a "tier-one city" and a triple-A bond rating. Please count me in the fight." – Marty Jewell

"Housing justice now." – Jay Tubb

“Our city council should be ashamed.” – James Randall

“NO MASS EVICTIONS!” – Amy Wentz

“We are already mired in a crisis of public faith in its city government, as our Mayor attempts to demolish one neighborhood without input from, and in fact, while hiding public business from his constituents. That RRHA would then attempt to demolish several more neighborhoods, and nearly all of their residents’ homes, with almost no consideration for their well-being, or of their desires, is a betrayal that will deeply wound Richmond and its most vulnerable residents.” – Charles Peters

“Make housing not only affordable, but livable.” – Paige Bailey

“Housing in Richmond is unaffordable and becoming more so with each subsidy the city gives to developers to put up more apartments that do not provide any public benefit. The RRHA plan to force residents into the private market is absurd and will leave people without any options. This is not right and should not stand.” – Suzanne Keller

“RRHA’s organizational culture of avoiding transparency holds the families that it serves hostage to the whims of an organization characterized by unstable leadership and lack of foresight.” – Will Kerner

“The proposed changes will have devastating effects to the families that occupy these homes. More importantly – selling public property to private investors is an obscene injustice. Planning to displace over 1300 housing units worth of people while the 2020-2024 5-year plan allocates relocation funding for less than 300 seems to be at best a massive oversight if not an intentional sabotage used to underscore how the system ‘doesn’t work’ and should be privatized.” – Samuel West

“Quit trying to gentrify the city. Only the rich and dc implants can afford to live in this dump!” – Kaitlin Eastman

“Nobody deserves to have their home demolished without a guaranteed actually-existing replacement. Stop this war on the poor now.” – Adam Steven